॥मनीषापञ्चकम्॥

Maneeshaapanchakam

(English translation by S.N.Sastri)

Introduction

In this work consisting of just five verses Sri Sankara has brought out succinctly the essence of Advaita Vedanta. The occasion for this composition may first be n arrated. One day Sri Sankara was walking towards the temple of Lord Viswanatha in Varanasi along with his disciples. It so happened that a sweeper was walking towards him on the same street. Sri Sankara asked the sweeper to move away from his path. The swe eper then asked him some questions which form the substance of two verses which are a prelude to the main work. On hearing these questions, Sri Sankara realized that the person before him was no ordinary sweeper. Sankara replies to these questions in five verses. These five verses have been collectively given the name 'Maneeshaapanchakam'. The word 'maneeshaa', meaning 'conviction' appears in the last line in all the five verses.

According to tradition, the sweeper was none other than Lord Siva Himself in that form. Sri Sankara himself is considered to be an incarnation of Lord Siva. Therefore this work is in essence a dialogue between two forms of Lord Siva, intended to convey to the world the essential teachings of Vedanta. Questions such as whether eve n Sri Sankara practised untouchability in spite of being an enlightened soul have no place in the light of these facts. Moreover, in all such cases the story by itself is not important. To derive various conclusions about other matters on the basis of the story would be going off at a tangent. One fact which emerges is that, once a person has attained Self-knowledge, considerations such as his caste, etc., are totally irrelevant.

The verses are now taken up one by one.

The sweeper's questions:--

अन्नमयादन्नमयं अथवा चैतन्यमेव चैतन्यात्।

द्विजवर दूरीकर्तुं वाञ्छसि किं ब्रूहि गच्छ गच्छेति॥१

1. O great among the twice-born! What is it that you want to move away by saying, "Go, go"? Do you want the body made

up of food to move away from another body made up of food? Or do you want consciousness to move away from consciousness?

किं गङ्गाम्बुनि बिम्बितेऽम्बरमणौ चण्डालवाटीपयः–
पूरे चान्तरमस्ति काञ्चनघटीमृत्कुम्भयोर्वाम्बरे।
प्रत्यग्वस्तुनि निस्तरङ्गसहजानन्दावबोधाम्बुधौ
विप्रोऽयं श्वपचोऽयमित्यपि महान् कोऽयं विभेदभ्रमः॥२

2. Is there any difference between the reflection of the sun in the waters of the Ganga and its reflection in the water in a ditch in the quarters of the outcastes? Or between the space in a gold pot and in a mud pot? What is this illusion of difference in the form, "This is a Brahmana and this is an outcaste" in the indwelling self which is the ripple-free ocean of bliss and pure consciousness?

Note. The indwelling self, which is identical with the supreme Self whose nature is bliss and pure consciousness, is the same in all creatures. As the Bhagavadgita says, "The enlightened see the same Self in the Brahmana endowed with learning and humility, the cow, the elephant, the dog and the outcaste" (5. 18).

Sri Sankara's answers:--

जाग्रत्स्वप्नसुषुप्तिसु स्फुटतरा या संविदुज्जृम्भते
या ब्रह्मादिपिपीलिकान्ततनुषु प्रोता जगत्साक्षिणी।
सैवाहं न च दृश्यवस्त्विति दृढप्रज्ञापि यस्यास्ति चेत्
चाण्डालोऽस्तु स तु द्विजोऽस्तु गुरुरित्येषा मनीषा मम॥१

1.If a person has attained the firm knowledge that he is not an object of perception, but is that pure consciousness which shines clearly in the states of waking, dream and deep sleep, and which, as the witness of the whole universe, dwells in all bodies from that of the Creator Brahma to that of the ant, then he is my Guru, irrespective of whether he is an outcaste or a Brahmana. This is my conviction.

Note. In the waking state the physical body as well as the senses and the mind function and experience external objects. In the state of dream there are no objects and the body and senses do not function, but the mind creates objects and events and experiences them. In deep sleep even the mind does not function. In all these three states consciousness is present. In the first two states the presence of consciousness is obvious because of the experience of external objects and the creations of

the mind respectively. It may appear as if in deep sleep there is no such experience, but it is the experience of every one that on waking up he remembers that he slept happily and did not know anything. Remembrance is possible only of what has actually been experienced previously. It therefore follows that consciousness existed during deep sleep also and that it was because of this consciousness that happiness and ignorance were experienced. This consciousness is thus the witness of all experiences as well as the absence of experiences. This consciousness is the Self that dwells in every living being. Everything other than this consciousness is an object. The external objects are objects of experience for the sense organs. The sense organs are objects for the mind. The mind itself is an object for the consciousness or Self. Thus the self alone is the subject and everything else is an object of experience. The person who has realized that he is the Self and not the mind or the senses or the physical body is an enlightened person. Such a person is the Guru for the whole world.

ब्रह्मैवाहमिदं जगच्च सकलं चिन्मात्रविस्तारितं
सर्वं चैतदविद्यया त्रिगुणयाऽशेषं मया कल्पितम्।
इत्थं यस्य दृढा मतिः सुखतरे नित्ये परे निर्मले
चाण्डालोऽस्तु स तु द्विजोऽस्तु गुरुरित्येषा मनीषा मम॥२

2. “I am Brahman (pure consciousness). It is pure consciousness that appears as this universe. All this is only something conjured up by me because of avidya (nescience) which is composed of the three gunas (sattva, rajas and tamas)”. One who has attained this definite realization about Brahman which is bliss itself, eternal, supreme and pure, is my Guru, whether he is an outcaste or a Brahmana.

शश्वन्नश्वरमेव विश्वमखिलं निश्चित्य वाचा गुरोः
नित्यं ब्रह्म निरन्तरं विमृशतां निर्व्याजशान्तात्मनाम्।
भूतं भावि च दुष्कृतं प्रदहतां संविन्मये पावके
प्रारब्धाय समर्पितं स्ववपुरित्येषा मनीषा मम॥३

3. Having come to the definite conclusion, under the instruction of his Guru, that the entire universe is always perishable, he who, with a calm and pure mind constantly meditates on Brahman, and who has burnt his past and future sins in the fire of knowledge, submits his present body

to the operation of his praarabdha karma. This is my conviction.

Note. Karma, in the sense of results of actions performed, is divided into three categories . (1) *sanchita karma*—the accumulated results of actions performed in past births, (2) *praarabdha karma*-- those results of past actions which have given rise to the present body and (3) *aagaami karma*—the results of actions performed in the present birth. On the dawn of Self-knowledge the first category is completely destroyed along with the third category acquired upto the time of attainment of knowledge. After the dawn of Self-knowledge any action performed does not produce any result in the form of merit or demerit. The second category, praarabdha karma, is not destroyed on the attainment of Self-knowledge, but has to be exhausted only by being actually experienced. On the exhaustion of this category of karma the body of the enlightened person falls and the *jivanmukta* becomes a *videhamukta.* This is brought out in the above sloka by the statement that the enlightened person merely submits his body to the operation of praarabdha karma.

या तिर्यङ्नरदेवताभिरहमित्यन्तः स्फुटा गृह्यते
यद्भासा हृदयाक्षदेहविषया भान्ति स्वतोऽचेतनाः।
तां भास्यैः पिहितार्कमण्डलनिभां स्फूर्तिं सदा भावयन्
योगी निर्वृतमानसो हि गुरुरित्येषा मनीषा मम॥४

4. The Self or pure consciousness is experienced clearly within by animals, men, and gods as 'I'. It is by the reflection of this pure consciousness that the mind, senses and body, which are all insentient, appear to be sentient. External objects are perceived only because of this consciousness. This Self is, however, concealed by the very mind, senses and body which are illumined by it, just as the sun is concealed by clouds. The yogi who, with a calm mind, always meditates on this Self is my Guru. This is my conviction.

Note. The Self or pure consciousness is what enlivens the mind, senses, etc., which are insentient, and enables them to function. Clouds owe their origin to the heat of the sun which makes the water in the oceans evaporate. The clouds become visible only because of the light of the sun behind them. The same clouds hide the sun from our view. Similarly, the body, mind, and senses, which owe their sentiency to the pure consciousness that is the Self, conceal the Self from us by making us engage ourselves in worldly pursuits all the time. The self can be realized only if the senses and mind are withdrawn from external objects.

यत्सौख्याम्बुधिलेशलेशत इमे शक्रादयो निर्वृताः

यच्चित्ते नितरां प्रशान्तकलने लब्ध्वा मुनिर्निर्वृतः।
यस्मिन्नित्यसुखाम्बुधौ गलितधीर्ब्रह्मैव न ब्रह्मवित्
यः कश्चित्स सुरेन्द्रवन्दितपदो नूनं मनीषा मम॥५

5. The Self, which is Brahman, is the eternal ocean of supreme bliss. A minute fraction of that bliss is enough to satisfy Indra and other gods. By meditating on the Self with a perfectly calm mind the sage experiences fulfillment. The person whose mind has become identified with this Self is not a mere knower of Brahman, but Brahman itself. Such a person, whoever he may be, is one whose feet are fit to be worshipped by Indra himself. This is my definite conviction.

,Note. The Upanishads say that the happiness experienced by all living beings, including the gods, is only a minute fraction of the supreme, infinite bliss of Brahman (Brihadaranyaka, 4.3.32, Taittiriya, 2.8). Knowing Brahman means knowing that one is Brahman and not the body-mind complex. He who attains this knowledge is Brahman itself (Mundaka, 3.2.9).Thus knowing Brahman is the same as remaining as Brahman. It should be noted that this is not the attainment of any new state. Every one is in reality Brahman, even when he is in bondage and looks upon himself as a limited human being. Liberation is nothing but the removal of the wrong identification with the body-mind complex by the realization of his real nature as the infinite, eternal Brahman. A rope is mistaken for a snake in dim light, but when it is examined with a light it is found that there never was a snake and that there was only a rope all the time. No one would say that there was a snake previously and that it had gone away. Similarly, when a person realizes that he is not the body-mind complex, but Brahman, it follows that he was always Brahman and that only the wrong notion about himself has been removed and nothing new has emerged. Thus there is no real bondage, but the individual jiva thinks, wrongly, that he is in bondage, due to ignorance of his real nature. When this ignorance is removed as a result of sravana, manana, and nididhyasana, the person becomes a jivanmukta here itself.

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